

MARGARET MEE. 2004. **Margaret Mee's Amazon: Diaries of an Artist Explorer.** (ISBN 1-85149-454-5, hbk.). Antique Collectors' Club in association with The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Sandy Lane, Old Martlesham, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 4SD, UK. (Orders: www.antiquecollectorsclub.com, 01394-389950, 01394-389999 fax, email info@antique-acc.com). \$59.50, 319 pp., water color paintings, 9 1/2" × 11 1/2".

Some books are a slow read, this was one. Not because it was boring...hardly! Encounters with snakes, armed poachers, malaria, electric eels, and storms, read as high adventure, to say the least. What made the book a slow read was that the book is also an art book, filled with full-page botanical paintings of Margaret Mee, the writer/artist/adventurer who journeyed to the Amazon to paint the rare and unknown flowers indigenous to the region. The reader is faced with the choice, at every turn of the page; do I read the wild story or do I gaze at the magnificent art? It is impossible to do both. The complex, otherworldly plants of the Amazon are executed in such exacting detail, you must pause and stare, thus forgetting about the story you were reading. Yet the adventure the artist recounts of hunting plants via dugout canoe, is so compelling, you dare not slow down to study the life-like paintings.

Margaret Mee's Amazon Diaries of an Artist Explorer is a hefty book bursting with big reproductions of her finished watercolors, intimate small sketches, studies done quickly 'in situ,' and photographs documenting the people met and the places visited. She recorded triumphs large and small, "I swam in the black water of the river, fearful of the currents, and went collecting in a dugout canoe with two young Indian boys. Gilberto climbed high in a tree, and from a rotting branch, which I feared would fall upon him, threw down a strange bromeliad which I had seen from afar the plant was not in flower, but I had no doubt that this was a new species."

Mee did not begin her travels deep into the fertile rainforests until the age of forty-seven. She continued until seventy-six. So focused was she on her mission to document the flora of the vanishing Amazon, that she would often return to a distant outpost, where a rare plant had been spotted months earlier, just for the opportunity to record it in bloom.

Ever focused on her mission to paint rare and unknown species, she brushed off the misery of mosquitoes, hunger, humidity and drenching rains. The artist writes in her diary of finding *Acacallis cyanea*—the blue orchid. "I walked until I was exhausted, wading through streams and then, with soaking canvas shoes, ploughed through black, swampy ground. But I was delighted with the results of my journey, for I had material for many paintings."

Margaret Mee when conditions favored such, set up an easel and painted, she also painted seated in the bottom of a rocking canoe, and when approaching dusk made either method of painting difficult, plants were piled into the bottom of the boat and painted later. She rendered the most complex of plants with a deft hand, explaining away the unfavorable conditions matter-of-factly, "the flowers fell in golden showers as I unraveled the tendrils. I painted the plant seated in the boat as we moved upstream, for vine flowers are delicate and ephemeral."

Her work combines the rare ability to commit to paper, the strictest botanical detail of a plant, while at the same time, imbuing it with artistry. Her will and determination triumphed in a series of paintings of the Moonflower, which blooms briefly and only at night. She set up an all night vigil to witness the opening of the night bloomer. As it unfurled she painting furiously, by torchlight...until daybreak, at which time the ephemeral flower withered and was no more. The resulting body of work represents the only known images of the nocturnal beauty.

Place this book at your nightstand. Read the wild adventure of this tireless explorer or gaze at the magnificent paintings of a brilliant botanical artist...or do both. You will be lured back to it nightly, like a moth to a Moonflower.

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DAVID R. FOSTER and JOHN D. ABER. 2004. **Forests in Time: The Environmental Consequences of 1,000 years of change in New England.** (ISBN 0-300-09235-0, hbk.). Yale University Press, 302 Temple Street, P.O. Box 209040, New Haven CT 06520-9040, U.S.A. (Orders: www.yale.edu/yup, 203-432-0960, 203-432-0948 fax). \$45.00, 447 pp., b/w figures, tables, index, bibliography, contributors, bibliographic essay, 6" x 9 1/4".

The book, *Forests in Time*, is composed of essays by multiple authors that discusses the history of a New England forest. Harvard University acquired nearly 3,000 acres to establish the Harvard Forest, a study site located in Petersham, Massachusetts, as an area to conduct ecological research. The authors stated that in order to understand current environmental issues, one must understand the history of a particular area. This book was easy to read, and provided graphs and tables to help the reader understand the ecological changes of a forest, although some of these graphs were harder to interpret than others. The authors use of detailed pictures throughout the book helps the reader develop a better perspective of how this forest changed through time. The book is divided into five main sections: background to ecological studies, regional history, modern forest landscape, understanding forest ecosystems, and lessons learned from this study.

The **first section** introduces readers to the ecological studies, conducted in the forest study site, and the reasons for Long Term Ecological Research (LTER). The text helps readers understand that landscape change occurs in response to environmental, anthropogenic, and biological factors. The landscape changes are studied at four spatial scales: site, landscape, sub-region, and region. Each of these spatial scales are affected by hydrology, humans, vegetation, and the biogeochemistry of the ecosystems. Because trees have long generation times, long-term studies must be conducted in order to understand any changes that occur.

The **second section** describes historical changes of the forest. The Harvard Forest landscape has seen a variety of changes in time: from being a tundra, boreal forest, and temperate forest at some point in its life. These changes occurred through natural (wind, pests, and fire), as well as anthropogenic (Native American) disturbances.

The **third section** explains how historical land use can affect species richness (number of species present) and species composition both directly and indirectly. The influence of several historical and modern factors were tested at the Montague Plain and Prospect Hill including prior land uses that can alter the soil organic matter and nutrient storage availability of the soil. The authors used several graphs to support the change in abundance of specific plants at each site and the effects of land-use history. These graphs showed a strong correlation between the carbon to nitrogen ratio and nitrification in forest soils with different land-use histories. Studies on the long term influences between the forest and atmosphere were performed. The forest removes more ozone than the atmosphere, and appeared to have a more considerable influence than urban areas or ecosystems composed of smaller vegetation. All of these changes have worked in creating the present forest ecosystem.

The **fourth section** discusses research conducted to understand forest ecosystems through long-term studies. Scientists conducted several research experiments designed to simulate hurricane affects on forest ecosystems, the process of nitrogen saturation, soil warming, and litter and root influences on soil. This research allows for long term study of these various effects. There were several controls